

A POTENTIALLY PRECIOUS PERFIN by George A. Fisher, Jr.

I collect Japan. Not all of it, but enough to keep me busy. Nothing after the 1940's. In stamps, only regular issues, and then only 1913 to 1945, except offices abroad which started in 1900. Postmarks are my favorite branch of philately, so I've lots of Japanese postmarks, but only certain kinds. I also like overseas flights, to or from Japan, up to 1945. And finally, but by no means least, I like Japanese Perfins. Except for minor used U.S. and a funny topical, Japan is all I collect. So, I'm in the Perfins Club to keep up with what other members might be doing in the way of Japanese Perfins.

But whether or not you collect Japanese Perfins, you ought to be interested in this report. I think it is a perfect example of one of the many fascinating phases that make philately the best hobby.

I belong to the International Society for Japanese Philately, and I receive its large bimonthly journal, "Japanese Philately." In the April 1968 issue it was reported that a new perforation variety of a stamp printed in early 1924 had just been discovered in Japan. The variety, it is believed, was caused by placing old perforating machines in service on new printings of stamps after the great earthquake of September 1923, until new machinery arrived to replace all the modern machinery that was destroyed in the quake. This discovery indicated a hitherto unknown chapter in the history of Japanese stamp production.

A major Japanese catalog includes this variety among its listings, assigning a value of 15,000 yen to the stamp in used condition (it's unknown in unused condition). As of March 1977 exchange rate, 15,000 yen equals about \$53. The initial discovery in 1968 consisted of four copies, but several others have been found since then, according to reports in the Japanese philatelic press.

Naturally, these reports aroused my interest, since I have been avidly seeking perforation varieties of the stamps I collect with the hope of acquiring a complete set both unused and used before I have to settle my estate. So perhaps you can appreciate the startled look that struck my face one day in 1972 when, while going through a miscellaneous approval selection of undistinguished material, I spotted a perforation variety--but not of the stamp already mentioned. This was a brand-new discovery!

The earlier discovery was a perf. 11 variety of Scott #175, the 20-sen blue "Fuji and deer" stamp of 1922. What I had found was the same gauge of perforation (11, or more precisely, 10.8) on the 50-sen brown regular issue of 1919, Scott #143. Specialists consider both stamps to be from the same definitive series. A report of this discovery was published in the June 1972 issue of "Japanese Philately" and that's the last anyone heard of it.

Until recently, that is. The 1977 edition of the Japanese catalog mentioned above was

issued in November 1976. I received my copy in late February 1977 and after browsing through it on and off for a couple of weeks, I noticed a new entry below the listing of the 1919 50-sen stamp. It was for a perf. 11 variety; a footnote explained that six copies were discovered in Japan in August 1976! And it was valued in the used column with a non-postal cancellation at 150,000 yen, or \$532!

My copy of this now apparently quite valuable rarity has a postal cancellation, and a foreign-mail one (in European letters) at that. But it also has another feature that should make all readers of this journal proud--it is Perfinned! But again I'm in luck. It is a blind Perfin; none of the holes goes completely through the paper. The Perfin, which is of the Hongkong (not, in this case, Hong Kong) and Shanghai Banking Corporation, is practically invisible from the face of the stamp. The postmark is lightly inked, and although Kobe can be made out as the city of use, the date is illegible.



The Stamp



The Perfin

Who can guess whether I'm keeping this stamp in my Perfin collection or in my perforation-variety collection? And--oh, yes--I suspect that the valuation of 150,000 yen is a typo for 15,000 yen. But even that's not bad for a stamp that catalogued 20¢ and was offered for sale for a nickel.